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An
Inaugural Dissertation
on
Podagra or Gout.
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Podagra or Gout.

One of the most painful and distressing diseases to which the human system is liable is Gout.–

Notwithstanding the disease has been noticed ever since the dawn of Medical Science, and much has been said by different authors concerning the cause of it, yet it still remains to be a matter unsettled, as to the true nature of the disease, and the best mode of treating it.–

The term, Gout, is said to be derived from the French, Goutte, a drop.

The ancients believed that all, or at least most of the diseases accompanied with swelling or tumefaction, were attributable to a flow of morbid humours to the part affected, which was called a defluxion, and the defluxion or rheum, was denominated, Cold, Hot, &c. according to the nature of the different symptoms. and to this cause was ascribed by the Arabian writers, the various diseases of the eyes, which were called Gutta serena, Gutta obsura &c. according to their different appearances.—

Barhave, considers gout to be a vitiated disposition of the very minute vessels and nerves in the body, from their too great straitness, rigidity; and also of the

liquid which nourishes the nerves from its acrimony and greater tenacity.—

Hoffman says that it is a saline tartarous substance, whilst some considers it a corrosive bilious salt, others an Acid, an earth an Alkali &c.

It has generally been thought that the disease depends upon a certain marbific matter always present in the system; and that this matter by certain causes thrown upon the joints and other parts, produces the several phenomena of the disease.—

Doctr. Chapman's opinion is, that the primary seat of Gout is the Stomach, and that it is intimately connected with the Lithic diathesis; and his reasons for adopting this opinion, seem to me, to be substantial.—

These positions he thinks are proven thus:

First, by the causes being such as act principally upon that organ, Secondly, by the disease being generally if not always, preceded or accompanied by some Gastric disorder; and thirdly, by our remedies being chiefly directed to that viscus.—

The second position, he thinks substantiated, by the disease being produced by nearly

similar causes with Gravel, and by the effusions in Gout being composed of the same ingredients as some the urinary Calculi.

There are a great many arguments which go to prove the correctness of Doctor Chapman's opinion; and if I comprehend him properly, I cannot do otherwise, than agree with his ideas on this subject.

What I understand by the Stomach's being the primary seat of the disease, may be thus explained.

I suppose in the first place, that there exists in the system a predisposition to the disease, and that this organ being acted upon by certain stimulants is excited primarily into action, from which

action proceeds all the phenomena of the disease, or gout.

I believe that these impressions, are such, as always produce debility of the direct, or indirect kind; and think also that this diathesis or predisposition to gout, sometimes exists in such a degree, that the smallest deviation from strict temperance is sufficient to make it develope itself.

This I think sometimes happens, with persons who have no hereditary predisposition, and who are generally, strictly temperate. I know of no other way of accounting for those anomalous cases, which are sometimes met with in practice.

We see proofs every day

of the fact, that, it is not necessary that our parents should have had diseases of a particular kind, for us to have them.- To give a familiar example; have we not seen children of the same parents, exposed at the same time to cold, under the same or similar circumstances, contract diseases of a different character? one, for instance will have Pleuritis; an other Rheumatismus; and perhaps a third will be taken with Synochus or Typhus. These we all know are diseases of different systems and textures.- Now how are these phenomena to be accounted for, but by concluding that it must be owing to idiosyncrasy, or peculiarity of structure in the part or system, which renders it

more liable to take on diseased action, than an other; which is a defect of our own systems, we do not inherit from our parents.

I do not wish to be understood to say, that we cannot inherit disease from our parents: but I wish to prove that we are frequently liable to disease, independant of our parents, and that gout, altho, generally hereditary, is not always so; and that it may occur in persons, where it cannot be accounted for, in any other way, than the one, in which, I have endeavoured to explain.—

It is the opinion of some Practitioners that women never have gout. Hippocrates believed that women seldom had this disease, and never before the disappearance of the catamenia. Cullen says, "it attacks especially the male sex, but sometimes though more rarely the Female."

Entertaining the Pathological views of the disease which I have endeavoured to explain; I cannot believe that gout is at all influenced by sex; but that if women (in general) were to indulge in the same excesses, and expose themselves to the occasional or exciting causes; they would be equally liable to the disease; That the diathesis is just as likely to exist

in the female, as male sex; and it is only necessary to expose themselves to the same causes, to make this distressing complaint develope itself in all its various Phenomena.

I cannot see how those authors can establish the fact, (by any train of Pathological reasoning,) that women are, from any peculiarity of structure less liable to this disease than men; and that eunuchs are entirely exempt from gout: unless they can prove that the primary seat of the disease, is the male organs of generation.

It may be looked upon, as presuming too much, in a young and inexperienced man, to set up his opinion, in opposition to older and more

experienced persons in the profession; and I hope I shall be pardoned if I have differed in opinion with all, or any of you, who have been my instructors; and who have also spared no expense or labour, to instil into the minds of your pupils, the correct principles of the extensive science to which you belong. I hope further that you will look upon what I have ventured to say, on this subject, as not having proceeded from a disposition to advance opinions, inimical to those of any member of the faculty: but from a spirit of investigation — and should I be wrong, I am not the first who have erred in venturing an opinion upon the nature of this most singular disease.

Gout has been distinguished into a great many varieties - as Podagra when the disease existed in the feet; Chiragra, in the hands; Pechyagra, in the elbow; Gonagra, in the Knee, Dentagra in the teeth; Cleisagra, in the articulations of the Clavicles; Omagra, in the Articulation Humerus; Rachisagra, in the spine of the back and Tenontagra in the large tendons. - Now I think it evident, from the many varieties into which they have distinguished gout, that the ancients could have known no distinction between this disease an Rheumatism; or if they did, thought it unnecessary to make any as these two diseas resemble each other in a great many re-

respects.- I think however that if the following rules are attended to, that generally, there will be but little difficulty in distinguishing Gout, from Rheumatism, altho there may occur cases wherein we may find some difficulty in making a just discrimination.

In the first place we should endeavour to ascertain whether any hereditary predispasition exists; secondly, we should be very particular in learning the symptoms which may have preceded the fit; and thirdly, we should inquire into the recurrences of the disease, the parts affected, and whether they are subject to any other disease between the fits, and the nature of that disease

if any should have existed; all of which circumstances are usually different in the two diseases. In gout we are told, that the pain generally attacks the small joints, and is not so apt to shift its situation; but when this does take place, it generally attacks the corresponding limb, or perhaps some of the viscera; We are also told that the parts are more red and swollen than in Rheumatism and that the dispeptic symptoms, which rarely precede Rheumatism, are sometimes present for several days, before a fit of the gout comes on.—

Gout comes on more frequently in the Spring of the year and in the begining of winter; and the period of life at which it most

commonly appears is from thirty-five to forty; when it appears earlier than this, it may be presumed to be owing to the diathesis existing in an uncommon degree, or to intemperance.

It is said that gout does not, like some chronic diseases, wear itself out by repeated attacks, but acquires strength with each returning fit, both with regard to the variety of parts which it attacks, and as to the degree of suffering and duration of the fit.

Gout is divided into several forms, as Tonic and Atonic (or Regular and Irregular) Retrocedent and Misplaced.—

I believe the principal circumstance which distinguishes the

regular, from the other varieties of the disease, is the inflammatory affection of the joints; Of the second or atonic form of the disease, there are two varieties; the retrocedent and misplaced;-

A paroxysm of regular gout sometimes comes on without any warning, but most frequently, I believe, the dispeptic symptoms, with an unusual coldness of the feet and legs, a numbness or a pricking sensation along the extremities, precedes the attack; lassitude and fatigue are experienced in a great degree upon the least exercise, the urine pallid and the bowels costive.-

An attack most commonly comes on at night, or about two or three

o'clock in the morning; the patient sometimes goes to bed in tolerable health, and after three or four hours is awaked by the excruciating pain which has attacked the joint of the large toe, heel, or as happens sometimes the whole foot; this increases in violence and is succeeded by rigors and other febrile symptoms with great throbing, and severe inflammation in the part.— Sometimes both feet are affected, but most commonly but one at a time.—

Towards day the pain subsides a little and the patient falls asleep; then a gentle sweat breaks out and terminates the paroxysm. a number of which constitute a fit of gout.—

Treatment

Altho I am of the opinion that hereditary gout cannot always, if ever, be entirely eradicated from the system; yet it is certain that much may be done, towards lessening the violence, and shortening the duration of the fit, and by this means meliorating the sufferings of our patient, by other remedies than those which I think are too frequently relied on: Patience and Flannel.—

Active purging would seem to be one of the most important indications in the treatment of gout; both with a view to removing the gastric affection and relieving pain.—

In this disease (as well as in many others) nature points out the plan we should pursue, in (frequently) terminating

the fit in a spontanious diarrhea, or Cholera morbus.–

It is thought best to commence the purging with large doses of Calomel followed up by Rhubarb and Magnesia; It may in some cases, where the patient is plethoric, and the pulse demands it, be proper to precede the purging, by venesection.–

The purging should be kept up as long as the symptoms and the nature of the discharges demand it. For this purpose the most drastic articles have been used, among which, are, Scammony, Gamboge and Elaterium; all of which I have no doubt are highly serviceable, and may be, indispensable to the cure of the disease.–

Emetics have also been used

in the treatment of gout, and no doubt but they are in some cases of great importance, where there is much gastric disorder.

Sweating is also of great advantage in the treatment of gout, and is considered by some, next in importance to purging; but we should never resort to this, until the violence of the paroxysm is somewhat subdued.—

Diuretics are also indicated by the copious discharges of urine which have been observed, as critical in gout, as well as their acknowledged utility in subduing inflammatory action; particularly in Rheumatism.—

It is said that all the indications which have been mentioned may

be met, by the famous nostrum of Dr. Hufson, (Eau medicinale) that it not only purges actively, but sometimes pukes, sweats, and almost invariably increases the urinary discharge. The composition of this medicine is still, I believe unknown, or at least there is no certainty of its discovery. –

Warm applications to the inflamed parts are very useful and cannot be dispensed with. Scudamore recommends, very highly a preparation of Camphor & Alcohol, in the proportions of 1 part of the Alcohol, to 3 of Spts. of Camphor, this is to be warmed and applied to the part affected. I know a young gentleman in Delaware, who is subject to this disease, who uses the Spts. Turpentine, and says that nothing else will

give him the least relief; he uses as much as a pint of this in the twenty-four hours.—

Wrapping the inflamed part up in carded wool, or cotton will sometimes give great relief.—

Blisters may sometimes be necessary where there is danger of a retrocession; but in such cases the stimulants should be resorted to; as the musk-julep, Ether, Opium, Carbonate of Ammonia, hot toddy, &c. The lancet must in some cases be used, even whilst we are giving the stimulants, particularly when the disease attacks the stomach or head, and the pulse is depressed. When the head is affected producing Apoplexy it should be treated in the same way, as apoplexy from any other

cause. – when it attacks the lungs it produces asthmatic or Pneumonic symptoms and should be treated by the remedies for those diseases. –

When the Kidneys are affected general & local bleeding, warm bath and warm fomentations, laudanum or opium, Tinct of Colchicum &c. should be used. – when the heart is affected, generally, the symptoms of Angina pectoris are felt, as palpitations &c. in this case, bleeding and antispasmodics are demanded, and blisters to the extremities. –

Misplaced Gout, should be treated in the same way as the retrocedent form of the disease, as it is the same thing, but has neglected to make its appearance in the

joints previous to its attacking some other part.

We should treat the atonic form of the disease by restoring tone to the stomach and invigorating the system.

This should be commenced by evacuating the alimentary canal and by Tonics, such as steel, Bark and many of the other tonics which are in use, particularly the bitter tonics.